Nepotianus

(Early 5th Century – c. 465)

BRIEFING

Nepotianus (died 465) was a general of the Western Roman Empire.

LIFE

Nepotianus married the sister of Marcellinus, the semi-independent ruler of Dalmatia; Julius Nepos, last Western Roman Emperor, might have been their son and did at some point succeed Nepotianus as ruler of Dalmatia.

In the Gothic War (457-458) he was *comes et magister utriusque militiae* and together with Aegidius, he commanded the army of the Western Emperor, Majorian. That same year Majorian started a military campaign to re-conquer Gaul; the army, reinforced by some barbarian mercenaries, dislodged the Visigoths of Theodoric II from Arelate and obliged them to return to their condition of *foederati*. With the help of his renewed *foederati*, Majorian entered in the Rhone Valley, conquering its populations "some by arms and some by diplomacy". He defeated the Burgundians and besieged and conquered the city of Lugdunum: the rebel city was heavily fined, while the Bagaudae were forced to join the Empire.

Baganudae

Bagaudae (also spelled **bacaudae**) were groups of peasant insurgents in the western parts of the later Roman Empire, who arose during the Crisis of the Third Century and persisted until the very end of the Western Empire, particularly in the less-Romanised areas of Gallia and Hispania. They were affected by the depredations of the late Roman state, wealthy landowners, and clerics.[1]

The invasions, military anarchy, and disorders of the third century provided a chaotic and ongoing degradation of the regional power structure within a declining Empire. During the chaos, the *bagaudae* achieved some temporary and scattered successes under the leadership of members of the underclass as well as former members of local ruling elites.

The name probably means 'fighters' in Gaulish.[2] C. E. V. Nixon[3] assesses the *bagaudae*, from the official Imperial viewpoint, as "bands of brigands who roamed the countryside looting and pillaging". J. C. S. Léon interprets the most completely assembled documentation and identifies the *bagaudae* as impoverished local free peasants, reinforced by brigands, runaway slaves and deserters from the legions, who were trying to resist the ruthless labor exploitation of the late Roman proto-feudal colonus manorial and military systems, and all manner of punitive laws and levies in the marginal areas of the Empire.

After the *bagaudae* came to the full attention of the central authorities around 284 AD, the re-establishment of the settled social order was swift and severe: the peasant insurgents were crushed in 286 AD by the co-Caesar Maximian and his subordinate Carausius under the aegis of the Augustus Diocletian. Their leaders are mentioned as Amandus and Aelianus, although E.M. Wightman, in her *Gallia Belgica*[5] proposes that the two belonged to the local Gallo-Roman landowning class who then became "tyrants"[6] and most likely rebelled against the grinding taxation and garnishing of their lands, harvests, and manpower by the predatory agents of the late Roman state (see *frumentarii*, *publicani*).

The *Panegyric of Maximian*, dating to 289 AD and attributed to Claudius Mamertinus, relates that during the *bagaudae* uprisings of 284–285 AD in the districts around Lugdunum (Lyon), "simple farmers sought military garb; the plowman imitated the infantryman, the shepherd the cavalryman, the rustic harvester of his own crops the barbarian enemy". In fact they shared several similar characteristics with the Germanic Heruli people. Mamertinus also called them "two-shaped monsters" (*monstrorum biformium*), emphasising that while they were technically Imperial farmers and citizens, they were also marauding rogues who had become foes to the Empire.

The phenomenon recurred in the mid-fourth century in the reign of Constantius, in conjunction with an invasion of the Alemanni. Although Imperial control was re-established by the Frankish general Silvanus, his subsequent betrayal by court rivals forced him

into rebellion and his work was undone. In around 360 AD the historian Aurelius Victor[7] is the sole writer to note the attacks of *bagaudae* in the peripheries of the larger towns and walled cities.

In the fifth century *Bagaudae* are noted initially in the Loire valley and Brittany, circa 409–417 AD,[8] fighting various armies sent against them by the last seriously effective Western Roman general, Flavius Aëtius. Aetius used federates such as the Alans under their king Goar to try and suppress a Bacaudic revolt in Armorica. St Germanus got mercy for the Bagaudae but they later revolted again under a leader called Tibatto. They are also mentioned around the same time in the province of Macedonia, the only time they emerge in the Eastern Empire, which may be connected with economic hardships under Arcadius.

By the middle of the fifth century they started to appear in Hispania too, and are mentioned in control of parts of central Gaul and the Ebro valley. In Hispania, the king of the Suevi, Rechiar (died 456 AD), took up as allies the local *bagaudae* in ravaging the remaining Roman *municipia*, a unique alliance between Germanic ruler and rebel peasant.[9]

That the depredations of the ruling classes were mostly responsible for the uprising of the *bagaudae* was not lost on the fifth-century writer of historicised polemic Salvian; setting himself in the treatise *De gubernatione Dei* the task of proving God's constant guidance, he declares in book III that the misery of the Roman world is all due to the neglect of God's commandments and the terrible sins of every class of society. It is not merely that slaves and servants are thieves and runaways, wine-bibbers and gluttons – the rich are much worse (IV, 3); it is their harshness and greed that drive the poor to join the *bagaudae* and flee for shelter to the barbarian invaders (V, 5 and 6).

Later life

In 459, some envoys of Nepotianus and of the Gothic *comes* Sunieric arrived in Gallaecia to announce the victory of Majorian and the treaty between the Romans and the Visigoths.

In May 460, Nepotianus and Sunieric led some troops in a joint attack with Theodoric to the Suebi: Nepotianus moved to Gallaecia and attacked the Suebic army, defeating it near *Lucus Augusti*.

At the beginning of the 460s, Nepotianus was deposed by order of Theodoric II, maybe because he opposed the powerful *magister militum* Ricimer, and was substituted by Arborius. He died in 465.

SUNIERIC

Sunieric (Latin: *Suniericus*; *fl* 459-461) was a Visigoth general, who collaborated with the Roman army in the re-conquest of Spain on behalf of Emperor Majorian.

Cyrila's successor, Sunieric was sent by king Theodoric II to Hispania Baetica, in 459, with a Visigothic army. Elevated to the rank of *comes rei militaris* in the same year, together with general Nepotianus, *comes et magister utriusque militiae* of Emperor Majorian, he sent messengers in Gallaecia to inform about the alliance between the Visigoths and the Empire. In the wake of this alliance, Sunieric and Nepotianus led a Visigoth army in 460 against Suebi, whom they defeated near *Lucus Augusti*, ravaging the neighbourhood and finally moved to the Lusitania, conquering the city of Scallabis.

In 461 he returned to Gaul.